

BALANCE WITHIN THE REBALANCE: THE SUPPORTING ROLE OF THE U.S. MILITARY IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION



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"We have learned that we cannot live alone, at peace; that our own well-being is dependent on the well-being of other nations..."¹

– Franklin Delano Roosevelt

The United States and particularly the Department of Defense is showing increasing interest in the Asia-Pacific region. This complex region contributes greatly to the world economy and is continuing to develop means to cooperate, yet contains tense friction points with potential to draw regional powers and even the United States into armed conflict. If not conducted carefully, any action taken by the United States to achieve benefits in this region could create greater potential for conflict and lose even the benefits the U.S. is currently enjoying. This paper will show that the U.S. must use its military cautiously in support of all elements of national power to enhance its influence in the Asia-Pacific region. To demonstrate this, it will consider why the United States is interested in the Asia-Pacific region and assess current U.S. strategy in the region as well as the role the U.S. military plays in the region with respect to diplomatic and economic efforts.

The Importance of the Asia-Pacific

Before examining how the United States might involve itself in the Asia-Pacific region, it is reasonable to ask why the United States is interested in the region. The Asia-Pacific region has had astonishing growth over the past several decades with significant potential for continued growth. With 61% of the world's population,² the region has tremendous economic potential and is extremely diverse; however it presents complex security issues.

The United States military has played a central role in securing the Asia-Pacific region, enabling extraordinary growth from Northeast Asia, to South and Southeast Asia. Many western nations have recognized that the Asia Pacific region has remarkable economic potential. According to the World Bank, the Asia-Pacific region's share of the Global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is 30% and regional growth is projected to outpace all other regions of the world. Since 2001, the growth of East Asia Pacific countries has been well above that of high-income nations. "East Asia Pacific continues to be the engine driving the global economy, contributing 40 percent of the world's GDP

growth – more than any other region.”³ This economic force driving the global economy and attracting investment, has transformed the region into what has been described as the “global factory.”⁴ That transformation is the result of outward-oriented development, indirect foreign and infrastructure investment, public sector partnerships, and the upgrading of human capital.⁵ This global factory has resulted in unprecedented and economic growth of countries in Asia and the Pacific. However that remarkable economic growth has produced “two faces of Asia and the Pacific. The first face is that of high performing economies; the second is that of resource rich, low income, less developed countries and small states.”⁶ Even with the tremendous economic growth poverty still remains a significant challenge in many of the countries throughout the region.

As demonstrated by its two faces, the Asia-Pacific’s substantial population growth, diversity and abundant natural resources combined with the extensive economic growth across the region presents prospects for great prosperity as well as diverging wealth distribution, increasing the potential for instability within the region. The capability to develop some predictability out of this dichotomy requires deliberate management among those nations with interest in the region. While it is true that the United States has been present in the Asia-Pacific region since the 1853,⁷ President Obama and his administration have emphasized the reinforcement of U.S. engagement in the Asia-Pacific. Whether labeled the “pivot” to the Pacific, as characterized by then-Secretary of State Clinton,⁸ or then-National Security Advisor, Tom Donilon’s “rebalance,”⁹ the administration has deliberately shifted the attention of those responsible for the national elements of power toward the Asia-Pacific region. President Obama articulated the goal of this shift during his address to the Australian Parliament in November 2011, “as the world’s fastest-growing region – and home to more than half the global economy – the Asia Pacific is critical to achieving my highest priority, and that’s creating jobs and opportunities for the American people,” with supporting objectives of sustaining a stable security environment and a regional order rooted in economic openness, peaceful resolution of disputes and respect for universal rights and freedoms.¹⁰ Recognizing that “a strong economy is and will continue to be a necessary component of national security,”¹¹ the National Security Strategy identifies the economy as the “wellspring of American power.”¹² In short, the United States’ rebalance toward the Pacific is about ensuring the U.S. can continue to influence the stability and security of the Asia Pacific region and be able to participate in the vast economic potential there.

Administration officials have further refined President Obama’s stated objectives. Tom Donilon detailed the objectives to the Asia Society in March 2013 as:

“strengthened alliances; deepening partnerships with emerging powers; building a stable, productive, and constructive relationship with China; empowering regional institutions; and helping to build regional economic architecture that can sustain shared prosperity.”¹³

National Security Advisor Susan Rice updated those objectives in November 2013 succinctly as 1) enhancing security, 2) expanding prosperity, 3) fostering democratic values, and 4) advancing human dignity.¹⁴

General Assessment of the Asia-Pacific

The Asia-Pacific region is extremely diverse and complex. Comprised of 36 countries, more than four billion people, speaking more than 3000 languages, live in the Asia-Pacific region. As globalization connects the region to the rest of the world, numerous transnational issues such as migration, corruption, drug trafficking, human trafficking, and other transnational crime, threaten the stability and prosperity within and across the region. Increased nationalism has caused internal political changes that threaten internal stability of several nations.¹⁵ With many of the world's oldest countries in the region, there are numerous historical disputes and territorial claims on land and sea that threaten stability. Not only do man-made conditions of instability abound, natural disasters in the Asia-Pacific region claimed 80% of the world's natural disaster casualties.¹⁶ Yet, with all this potential for conflict, the region is characterized as relatively stable. The United States is not engaged in armed conflict with any nation in the region, nor has it identified any nation in the region, other than the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) as hostile. While U.S. security involvement in the region has been described as a bilateral hub and spoke architecture, primarily relying on bilateral alliances,¹⁷ President Obama had made it clear that the United States is more actively supporting multilateral processes, expecting increased security and stability to lead to greater prosperity of all nations in the Asia-Pacific.¹⁸

The Asia-Pacific region is most commonly divided into four sub regions: Southeast Asia, Oceania, South Asia, and North East Asia. Each of these sub regions is relatively stable, yet potentially volatile. Armed conflict among countries is not likely, except due to miscalculation or accident.¹⁹ The United States has started bilateral dialogues with most Asia-Pacific nations and regional organizations exist to begin or continue multilateral discussions across the region, reducing the probability of military conflict.

Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia, including Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam, is geographically open and has captured the enthusiasm of American foreign policy makers, perhaps mostly due to the increasing effectiveness of the Association of South Eastern Asia Nations (ASEAN) and its related regional governance and economic organizations. As Donilon has stated, "[T]he United States is not only rebalancing to the Asia-Pacific, we are rebalancing within Asia to recognize the growing importance of Southeast Asia."²⁰ ASEAN and its community organizations have successfully applied a multilateral collaborative character of mutual respect and dialogue within a regional economic architecture that enabled the ASEAN Free Trade Area and ASEAN Investment Area to the security arena as well. Through cooperation with the United Nations, ASEAN has established a positive, confident climate of quiet dialogue that allows member nations to discuss regional territorial disputes without armed conflict.²¹ Though overlapping claims remain in the region, the parties involved have not indicated a willingness to use force to assert their claims and seem resolved to manage these disputes peacefully. With mutual defense agreements in place with two countries, The Republic of the Philippines and Thailand, the United States is committed in this sub region. It must be noted that SE Asia does contain areas of significant internal unrest and insurgency in Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Myanmar. The violent forms that these ethnic and religious-based incidents of unrest

have taken at times demonstrate the fragility of security in the face of transnational threats even with strong international and regional involvement.²² Still, this sub region remains poised to exploit its vast resource and economic potential.

Oceania

Oceania, including Australia, New Zealand, and the developing Pacific nations territories, and freely associated states in Micronesia, Melanesia, and Polynesia, contains a wealth of natural oceanographic and geologic resources. It is a largely isolated sub region that is open to exploitation of fragile governments and widely disparate economies. With the responsible leadership of Australia and recent changes in their relationships with New Zealand, the less developed and small countries of Oceania can ensure a share in the trade of the natural resources that are just being explored. The United States retains a vested interest in this sub region through its several island territories and through the Australia and United States Security Alliance as well as the resumption of its security relationship with New Zealand. Oceania has several regional forums (e.g. the Pacific Islands Forum, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, and the Melanesian Spearhead Group) that, though fragmented and marginally successful, could be a start to address regional security concerns. The sub region's culture encouraging hospitality and cooperation known locally as "the Pacific Way," holds potential for application to security concerns.²³

South Asia

South Asia, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka, has increasing populations and burgeoning economies, but with significant land territorial disputes that present some security concerns. With about 4% exports among the countries in South Asia, there is little economic interdependence. Production of similar raw materials and finished goods exacerbates this concern and encourages competition rather than cooperation. The fact that two of the nations with the greatest potential for violent conflict over territorial disputes are actively seeking nuclear weapons reveals significant potential for instability that could affect the entire Asia-Pacific region as well as the rest of the world. Although the countries within this region have not regularly demonstrated a desire to cooperate, a reinvigorated South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) could be a starting point to address regional security concerns in this sub region.²⁴

Northeast Asia

North East Asia, including the economic powerhouses of China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea, as well as Russia, Mongolia, Taiwan and North Korea, is significant not only because it includes three of the four largest economies in the world, but also because of the numerous areas of potential conflict combined with the military power of the nations involved. North Korea, the United States' only recognized aggressor nation in the region, has caused instability in the sub region due to numerous provocations and has been labeled as unpredictable by its neighboring countries. Other regional issues involve historic land and sea territorial disputes among most of the

Northeast Asia nations, and in several of those disputes, military action cannot be ruled out. Because of treaty obligations to Japan and the Republic of Korea, the United States may be compelled to act as well. This is the only sub region that has not developed a sub regional organization to regulate economic growth or resolve disputes.²⁵

Despite the numerous friction points that bear observation, encouraging cooperation and increasing stability seem to be both desirable and achievable by nearly all members of the Asia-Pacific region including the United States. Balancing the economic potential with the potential for instability -- that is managing the peace -- will require the careful application of all of the elements of national power in appropriate measure. The Obama administration has indicated that the rewards outweigh the risks, and as direct investments from U.S. other foreign investors outside the region and the U.S. Agency for International Development disbursements increase slightly, "the numbers indicate that efforts to increase U.S. economic ties with the Asia-Pacific region have paid dividends."²⁶

Assessment of U.S. Security Strategy in the Asia-Pacific Region.

As stated earlier, the United States National Security Strategy identifies the economy as the "wellspring of American power," so it follows that efforts to reap economic benefits from the thriving economies in the Asia-Pacific would be a critical part of the National Security Strategy and our National Military Strategy would focus on that region as well. And indeed, as seen above, the U.S. military is operating in the Asia-Pacific region. However, just as the region is complex, so must be the methods taken by the United States to influence security in the region. Security often connotes military action or activities, and with the U.S. Navy and U.S. Air Force moving to station more than 60% of their platforms in the Pacific and with the U.S. Army and Marine Corps realigning forces and increasing rotational units throughout each of the sub regions, the U.S. military is actively conducting operations in the region. Congress may be encouraging the military to take an even greater role in securing the region. The seapower subcommittee of the U.S. House Armed Services Committee seems to have reached a consensus that there is no coherent US strategy in the Asia-Pacific that connects the political aims with the means to reach those aims.²⁷ By identifying a void of a well-defined strategy for the United States, and in particular for its military in the Asia-Pacific region, Congress is calling on the Department of Defense to justify funding of its services on anticipated activities in the Asia-Pacific region. ²⁸ Although it may also seem to follow that the services should budget for and develop forces directly for the task of securing the Asia-Pacific region, doing so may have a detrimental effect in the region.

Defense officials, in an attempt to fill the perceived void in strategy, have developed a strategic concept to ensure access and maintain freedom of action across all domains in the region – sea, air, land, space, and cyberspace. Air Sea Battle (ASB) is a critical component of the strategic guidance issued in 2010 and purports to support our allies and partners in the region. However, with considerable budget constraints and increased competition for limited resources, military planners and force developers have taken this concept along with the priority placed on the Asia-Pacific region to mean that forces and budgets must be developed to defeat enemies in the Asia-Pacific. The current method of budgeting for, developing, and sizing forces is to plan against an opposing force to ensure success in any anticipated operations should armed conflict be required. That begs

the question: who is the United States' enemy in the Pacific? As stated earlier, North Korea is the only aggressor nation recognized as such by the United States, so that might be the logical choice. However, in order to ensure that the military is able to win the nation's wars, military planners and budget officials look for a worst-case enemy. The easily identifiable "worst-case enemy" in the region is China. With its increasing defense spending and modernizing military, China is certainly a regional competitor of the United States with the advantage of location.

Just as the United States is watching China, China is observing the United States. China watched along with the former USSR as the U.S. developed the Air-Land Battle strategy to defeat the Soviet Army after the Vietnam War, and China continues to watch. With improved U.S.-China relations, they may not be watching as an aggressor or an enemy, but undoubtedly as a competitor. Chinese nationalists and "hardline" officials tend to take an alarmist view of the U.S. rebalance, particularly the visible increase in military capabilities, as a "strategy of encircling and containing China."²⁹ To them, the January 2012 Defense Department strategic guidance, by lumping China and Iran together as potential adversaries in the anti-access/area denial challenge (A2/AD), indicates that the United States considers China an aggressor, even if its diplomats deny it. ASB reinforces that suspicion as it seeks to defeat A2/AD challenges in the global commons across all domains in order to disrupt and defeat those capabilities to provide maximum operational advantage to US forces.³⁰ According to one commentator, "this pivot to the Asia-Pacific potentially has a dual character: it can be part of an engagement strategy with the region and increase of its presence, as well as be part of a China containment strategy. However, what has fundamentally been put into practice is a containment strategy ... A military strategy aimed at a future conflict with China has been adopted, which is anchored in the Air-Sea Battle operational concept."³¹ This view instigates suspicion as the U.S. expands cooperation with allies and partners, using them as proxies for further means of containment.³² This negative view could get even worse. Given the fact that many U.S. allies and partners in the region are also major economic partners with China, increased military competition could force them to make a choice between the United States and China.³³ "The path to military superiority in the region could lead to strategic failure if it induces Chinese militarism..."³⁴

The United States must be careful in devising a military strategy that depends on identifying an enemy in the region. As Ely Ratner explains, "in the years ahead, China's perceived sense of insecurity will likely intensify as the United States continues to deepen diplomatic, economic, and military engagement in Asia ... The U.S. shift toward Asia should and will continue, but its execution must account for an insecure China in order for the rebalancing to achieve its intended aims."³⁵ Although the competition for resources is high and it is tempting for the military services to use the pivot as justification to resource new technology, intelligence collection and weapon systems, as well as force structure, the services must realize they cannot do so without being noticed by those who might be labeled as adversaries. Recognizing that "war is merely the continuation of policy by other means,"³⁶ the U.S. must not convert political or economic competitors into potential aggressors by acting in a way that encourages armed conflict to achieve their political or economic objectives. The answer to the question: "who is the enemy?" is: there is no substantial enemy. Increasing prosperity in the region – and assuring that the United States has a share in that prosperity – depends on there not being an adversary that feels increasingly threatened by U.S. activity in the region. Operations by the United States in the region should strive to assure all Asia-

Pacific nations that everyone benefits from increased regional cooperative security and that all deserve share in the prosperity that increased security brings.

Building Trust is Essential

The U.S. military has spent decades building trust in the Asia-Pacific region. This trust has been a result of simply performing their mission to ensure regional security and a secondary effect of well-planned and executed military-to-military discussions, exchanges, and exercises. Those operations were primarily designed to ensure interoperability and maintain access. The desired effect was the ability to conduct combat operations. Relationships and trust, though important, were by products. The true benefit of the trust that the military-to military relationships developed has not been fully realized, and may still not be.

There has been great interest in the development and use of technology to overcome the long distances between the United States and the Asian countries.³⁷ The ASB concept continues that call for developing technology that will defeat A2/AD.³⁸ What is not completely recognized is the fact that these forms of technology employed without consideration of relationships, erode trust by rousing suspicion and encouraging escalation, with detrimental effect on the interests of both the United States and China as well as the rest of the region. The initial development of ASB seems to confirm that line of suspicion. Attempts to generalize the framework, as well as the strategy it implies, have done little to counter the justification for mistrust. China's development of "counter-intervention" capabilities, such as precision strike missiles, anti-satellite weapons, anti-ship missiles and attack submarines, although not focused on any one country demonstrate this escalation and indicate a reluctance to trust.³⁹ As the United States seeks the development of technological tools and uses them to attempt to influence regional security, the very nature of those tools can undermine security in the region.

Looking at this negative reinforcing nature of technological development, it might seem that by taking an active role in expanding security in the Asia-Pacific the United States will only decrease security. However, that pessimistic interpretation is not the only view. The United States must do more than just monitor its competitors. It must engage them. The full secret to U.S. respect in the region is not just the technologically advanced surveillance and weapons systems that assure the advantage of the United States and those who choose to partner with it. It is in the consistently demonstrated excellence in professionalism and transparency, as well as the visible accountability that civilian control of the military reveals. The U.S. military can be trusted because they are accountable, and if the most powerful military can be trusted, then their country can be as well. Secretary of Defense Hagel emphasized the importance of relationships over technology during the Shangri-La Dialogue, "Relationships, trust, and confidence are what matters most to all people and all nations."⁴⁰

Trust is central to cooperation. "Nations that do not cultivate, build and nurture trust in their relations with other countries can see their pursuit of peace and prosperity engulfed by anomalies that, if not properly managed, can even lead to war."⁴¹ The objective, cooperation, is a matter of will – convincing potential adversaries that the U.S is genuinely interested in enabling the prosperity of the entire region. The traditional process to ensure the defeat of an enemy is to concentrate against the enemy's army or military force as the center of gravity. Technologically advanced weapons and

clever strategy can enhance that defeat. However, Sun Tsu identified that center of gravity as the enemy's will.⁴² It follows then that the center of gravity of a potential partner is also his will. The leaders of the United States Army, Marine Corps and Special Operations Command in their Strategic Landpower joint white paper recognized that military strategists and planners focus on "the clash and lose sight of the will" in armed conflict.⁴³

Planning for success in the clash – military victory – the enemy's center of gravity, the enemy force or terrain, is the objective. But when there is no enemy, or no substantial conflict, the prevention of conflict requires a new center of gravity, and focusing on that center of gravity must not provoke a competitor into armed conflict. Here, Sun Tsu's definition of center of gravity may serve better, as does his concept of winning without fighting.⁴⁴ The leaders purporting judicious use of strategic landpower recognize this: "preventing conflict is always difficult, but it remains a far better option than reacting after fighting has erupted."⁴⁵

In the case of the Asia-Pacific region, the center of gravity arises within the human domain. Building personal relationships between political leaders has been crucial for improved stability between the United States and China.⁴⁶ The goal in relationships and the benefit of establishing trust is influence.⁴⁷ The personal contact required for building relationships falls squarely inside the human domain. "[T]he success of future strategic initiatives and the ability of the U.S. to shape a peaceful and prosperous global environment will rest more and more on our ability to understand, influence, or exercise control within the human domain."⁴⁸ "The Human Domain cannot be controlled or managed by technical means or capabilities; it requires human contact--person to person interaction—with duration, persistence over time..."⁴⁹ In short, The center of gravity is the will. The center of gravity that the United States should be focusing its resources on is not the forces it may confront in an armed conflict, but the national will of the allies, partners and potential partners in the region. It is through such relationships that the will of the people of those nations can be influenced in favor of the United States. The United States must increase its emphasis on activities that seek to mitigate the likelihood of conflict.⁵⁰ Secretary of Defense Hagel expressed his recognition of this in Shangri-La, stating that relationships are the key, and critical to any relationship is trust. From trust comes confidence, and from confidence comes the prosperity sought by all with interests in the Asia-Pacific.

The Role of the U.S. Military in Building Trust

The question now becomes how to build trust. Recent events involving technological advancements suggest that technological means of engagement tend to erode trust. Cyber attacks,⁵¹ electronic surveillance,⁵² and accusations of commercial espionage⁵³ convey a disposition of mistrust among competitors and even put alliance partnerships at risk.⁵⁴

Trust comes through direct contact, and land power is well suited to do just that. "Landpower is particularly important in the human domain largely because it puts U.S. forces in direct contact with those they seek to influence; whether by deterring enemies, or convincing them to stop what they are doing, or by convincing civilian policymakers and populations that they share objectives and priorities with the United States."⁵⁵ "[O]nly the Army and Marines can provide a security commitment to America's partners in Asia that does not simultaneously threaten China. Landpower is the only avenue by which America can enhance regional security and stability, deter Chinese

militarism, and encourage Chinese commitment to the global status quo.”⁵⁶ Capitalizing on this concept, one area that has produced significant success for landpower forces is humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) operations. These operations provide excellent opportunities to demonstrate commitment and build trust, while working cooperatively with partners and potential partners with a common goal that all can support. It is certainly one of the military contingencies that landpower can accomplish.

U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM) is implementing the security aspects of the rebalance by expanding the size and scope of its already robust exercise and engagement program focused on "maintaining a credible defense posture, strengthening relationships with our allies, expanding our partner networks, and preparing to accomplish the full range of military contingencies."⁵⁷ The deterrence element demonstrates the United States commitment to its allies and enables discussion with competitors. While it must be wielded carefully, without that element, other regional powers could reduce the role of the United States in the region and thereby reduce its ability to reap the benefit of prosperity as well. USPACOM is supporting diplomatic efforts by recognizing the effect that military leaders in the region can have. In response to Typhoon Haiyan, US forces conducted HA/DR operations with other regional militaries, including the Chinese Navy, to reduce human suffering, with the effect according to Admiral Locklear of underpinning security and prosperity. In Thailand, even with political unrest, the U.S and Thai military-to-military efforts continue underscoring U.S. commitment and the cooperative nature of the relationship as well as supporting the diplomatic solutions that may be forged.⁵⁸ PACOM has invited China to participate in RIMPAC, the Pacific's largest multilateral naval exercise, and the U.S. Army Pacific (USARPAC) will co-host the Pacific Army Chiefs' Conference with China for the first time.⁵⁹ These efforts will support further U.S. diplomatic and economic efforts in the region.

One specific example of how the U.S. military will engage in the region and build relationships is USARPAC's Pacific Pathways concept. Landpower allows the U.S. to strengthen partners and allies, and build stable security systems with a smaller commitment of U.S. troops, serving the national interest while limiting costs.⁶⁰ The U.S. Army, as it aligns forces with geographic combatant commands, has designated several brigades to conduct short-term engagements as part of rotating three-month deployments. in order to effectively engage with armies throughout the Asia-Pacific region. These units will spend time in the region participating in numerous exercises and, if required, provide disaster relief with allies, partners, and potential partners or respond as part of a combat force, e.g. should hostilities erupt on the Korean Peninsula.⁶¹ Emphasis is given to engagement, particularly by small units and soldiers, who continually demonstrate, through their sincere expression, that our values are more than just diplomatic talking points. Their presence provides diplomatic credibility.

By continuing to support multinational relief efforts in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations, fostering military-to-military relationships across the region, maintaining commitments with allies and partners, and including potential partners in heretofore exclusive exercises, as well as demonstrating a cooperative relationship, even among countries that may seem adversarial, PACOM is providing a base upon which diplomats and economic leaders can build. Engagements by high ranking military leaders as well as small units can begin to meet of the

national security objectives of enhancing security and fostering democratic values, while fostering an expanding prosperity and advancing human dignity. Small unit peaceful engagements exemplify civilian control of the military and U.S. soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines demonstrate strength of diversity, while U.S. diplomats encourage stability through good governance.

The U.S. Military's Supporting Role

This effort to enable regional prosperity by building confidence through trusted relationships with allies, partners and potential partners is much larger than positive military presence. Admiral Locklear, the USPACOM commander, understands that the rebalance requires more than just military effort. "The U.S. rebalance has many aspects to it, and it's not just military – it's economic, it's social, it's diplomatic."⁶² Success will require the full application of national and even international power integrating military and non-military operations in a comprehensive manner to achieve the objective.⁶³ These non-military operations or engagements can build on successful military-to-military engagements. "In Myanmar, we are beginning targeted, carefully calibrated military-to-military engagement aimed at ensuring the military supports ongoing reforms, respects human rights, and a professional force accountable to the country's leadership."⁶⁴ While military effort is the most visible aspect of the rebalance, it is by no means the only, or even the primary means.

Diplomatically, the Obama administration is increasing engagement at official meetings such as Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), ASEAN, and the East Asia Summit, as well as informal meetings such as the Shangri-La Dialogue.⁶⁵ It is also calling for a collaborative effort, enabling regional organizations such as APEC, ASEAN, SAARC, and the PIF, to maintain stability and resilience, encourage cooperation and resolve disputes, ensuring countries can rise together peacefully.⁶⁶ Confidence building efforts within these organizations enhance security relations, reducing the likelihood of armed conflict while providing means to address transnational threats as well.

Economically, the administration is emphasizing "the economic, transport, and strategic linkages between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific region," as well as aggressively supporting the Trans-Pacific Partnership that sets high standards for environmental and labor regulations, protection of intellectual property, financial services, government procurement, and competition.⁶⁷ While military and diplomatic efforts are relatively easy to track, they only support the desired benefit of economic opportunity and increased prosperity. Those benefits are more difficult to attribute and certainly take longer to manifest. It is also significant that the administration does not control the economic element of national power, even as it wants to secure those benefits. "[I]n the U.S. system most economic activity is performed by the private sector; the U.S. government cannot create a favorable business environment in Asia-Pacific countries. Attracting more U.S. trade and investment requires Asian governments to speed up the pace of domestic economic reform, which is often politically difficult."⁶⁸

Conclusion

The United States has a vested interest in the continued economic rise and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region and desires a share in that prosperity. By calling for a pivot to the Asia-Pacific Region and prioritizing the region, President Obama is applying all elements of national power to increase the security and stability of the region and foster the continued economic growth of the region. Regional and sub regional architecture exists that can be strengthened to further increase stability and ensure continued economic growth. The rebalance must balance the elements of national power appropriately to achieve the administrations' desired effect. The U.S. military is playing a vital supporting role in building relationships and maintaining trust among the countries in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly with landpower in HA/DR operations, upon which diplomatic and economic actions can build. Although the Obama administration has stated numerous times that the pivot is not designed to contain China, the U.S. military's rebalance, if not conducted cautiously, could polarize the region. Developing a military strategy using an inappropriate approach that focuses on possible adversaries that assumes China to be an aggressor risks polarizing the region with detrimental effect on security and economic prosperity – the prosperity that President Obama has stated is the goal of the pivot to the Asia-Pacific region.

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The views expressed in these articles are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of APCSS, the U.S. Pacific Command, the U.S. Department of Defense, or the U.S. government.

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Endnotes

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